



Balserak, J. (2013). 'We need Teachers today, not Prophets': Peter Martyr Vermigli's Exposition of Prophecy. *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 103, 92-116. <https://doi.org/10.14315/arg-2012-103-1-92>

Peer reviewed version

Link to published version (if available):  
[10.14315/arg-2012-103-1-92](https://doi.org/10.14315/arg-2012-103-1-92)

[Link to publication record in Explore Bristol Research](#)  
PDF-document

This is the author accepted manuscript (AAM). The final published version (version of record) is available online via De Gruyter at <https://www.degruyter.com/view/journals/arg/103/1/article-p92.xml>. Please refer to any applicable terms of use of the publisher.

## University of Bristol - Explore Bristol Research

### General rights

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite only the published version using the reference above. Full terms of use are available:  
<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/red/research-policy/pure/user-guides/ebr-terms/>

“We need Teachers today, not Prophets;”<sup>1</sup>

## Peter Martyr Vermigli’s Exposition of Prophecy

JON BALSERAK

Peter Martyr Vermigli’s views on prophecy appear to be self-contradictory. He declares, for instance, “[i]n my judgment, it ought not to be denied that there are still prophets in the church.”<sup>2</sup> Yet he also states, “[w]e have no promise that Christ would adorn his church with such gifts [as prophecy] perpetually,”<sup>3</sup> by which Vermigli clearly means “in our day.” In asserting the former, he does not take the approach common to many of his colleagues among the magisterial reformers. That is, he does not use texts like Romans 12: 6 and 1 Corinthians 14: 3, 26-33 to argue that there is a prophetic office in the New Testament church which continues into the post-apostolic era. In fact, he explicitly condemns this approach. In asserting the discontinuance of prophecy, Vermigli also takes an interesting, though somewhat less surprising, path. Again he offers no support (biblical or otherwise), but argues that the prophetic office ended with the closing of the primitive church era. He says that prophecy has now been replaced by the teaching of the gospel in the same way that speaking in tongues has been replaced by the careful study of languages, the gift of healing by the practice of medical doctors, and the power of delivering the wicked over to Satan by the magistrate’s use of the sword.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> This is a slightly-paraphrased version of a statement found in, PMV Gen, 81r.

<sup>2</sup> PMV Gen, 81r.

<sup>3</sup> PMV Gen, 81r.

<sup>4</sup> PMV Gen, 81r.

The present article aims to expound Vermigli's views on prophecy and, in the process, seeks to give an account of this apparent self-contradiction. In order to do this, we will examine Vermigli's background (specifically, the scholastic character of his learning) as well as his contemporary situation in the mid-sixteenth century. Concerning the latter, we will argue that Vermigli was troubled by certain prevailing views on prophecy and that this likely influenced his own view, resulting in the apparently incompatible assertions just noted. The 1520s saw some reformers—e.g. Ulrich Zwingli, Johannes Oecolampadius, and the *école rhénane*<sup>5</sup>—develop a strong interest in the prophetic books of the Old Testament and in the idea of a prophetic ministry. This prophetic paradigm was employed by them in their efforts to break out of a Roman Catholic sacerdotal model of ministry and to plot a new identity for a reformed Christian ministry.<sup>6</sup> Zwingli, for example, expounded the idea of a prophetic ministry in works like *Der Hirt*<sup>7</sup> and *Von dem Predigtamt*,<sup>8</sup> in which he interpreted 1 Corinthians 14: 3, 26-33 as supportive of such a ministry.<sup>9</sup> Similar ministry models spread throughout various parts of Germany, the Swiss territories, and the British Isles.<sup>10</sup> Vermigli would have

---

<sup>5</sup> Bernard Roussel, "Des auteurs" in Guy Bedouelle and Bernard Roussel (ed.): *Le temps des Réformes et la Bible; Bible de tous les temps*, 5 vols., Paris 1989, 5, pp. 199-305 especially, 215-233.

<sup>6</sup> Robert J. Bast, "Constructing Protestant Identity: the Pastor as Prophet in Reformation Zurich" in Gudrun Litz, Heidrun Munzert, and Roland Liebenberg (ed.): *Frömmigkeit – Theologie – Frömmigkeitstheologie*, Leiden 2005, pp. 350-362.

<sup>7</sup> ZW 3: 5-68; see Bast, pp. 350-362. There are many studies on Zwingli and prophecy; see, for instance, Fritz Büsser, *Huldrych Zwingli: Reformation als prophetischer Auftrag*, Zürich 1973.

<sup>8</sup> ZW 4: 382-433.

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, ZW 4: 394-398.

<sup>10</sup> Philippe Denis, "La prophétie dans les Eglises de la Réforme au xvi<sup>e</sup> siècle," in: *Revue d'Histoire ecclésiastique* 72 (1977), pp. 289-316; Pamela Biel, *Doorkeepers at the House of Righteousness: Heinrich Bullinger and the Zurich Clergy, 1535-1575*, New York 1991; Bast, pp. 350-362; idem, *Honor your Fathers: Catechisms and the Emergence of a Patriarchal Authority in Germany, 1400-1600*, Leiden 1997; Daniel Bollinger, "Bullinger on Church Authority: The Transformation of the Prophetic Role in Christian Ministry" in Bruce Gordon and Emidio Campi (ed.): *Architect of Reformation; An Introduction to Heinrich Bullinger, 1504-1575*, Grand Rapids 2004, pp. 159-177; R. Gerald Hobbs, "Strasbourg: Vermigli and the Senior School," in: CPMV, pp. 35-69; and Peter Opitz, "Von prophetischer Existenz zur Prophetie als Pädagogik; Zu Bullingers Lehre vom munus propheticum," in Emidio Campi and Peter Opitz (ed.): *Heinrich Bullinger;*

come in contact with such models, particularly while in Strasbourg (1542-1547 and 1553-1556) and in Zurich (1556-1562). During this time he came in contact with Anabaptist groups, and complained bitterly that their reckless misuse of this idea of prophecy would lead to the demise of all good order in the church.<sup>11</sup> We shall argue that the Anabaptist problem exerted a significant influence on Vermigli's perspective on prophecy. It was one of the key factors that gave impetus to his developing negative views on the subject.

In order to set Vermigli's views on prophecy within a broader context, we will first make a brief survey of medieval scholastic approaches to the question of prophecy. This will serve to highlight several themes and assumptions which belong to Vermigli owing to his thorough training in the scholastic method,<sup>12</sup> and which will help us make clearer sense of his understanding of prophecy. A subsequent discussion will demonstrate the presence of these scholastic themes in Vermigli's thought on prophecy. Turning then to more specific questions, this essay will, next, examine two matters: first Vermigli's thinking on the closing of the prophetic office; and secondly how Vermigli, nonetheless, holds that prophets continue to be raised up by God and, in fact, can still exist in his own day. These considerations will raise the larger question of what Vermigli seems to be striving for when articulating his position on prophecy. This larger question will be taken up in the concluding section, where I will return to Vermigli's context and argue that his position lays stress upon the ordinary teaching ministry of the church while leaving room for the idea that God can still raise up prophets when circumstances require.

---

*Life – Thought – Influence; Zurich, Aug. 25-29, 2004 International Congress Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575)*, 2 vols., Zurich 2007, 2, pp. 493-513.

<sup>11</sup> This will be examined below.

<sup>12</sup> See John Patrick Donnelly, *Calvinism and Scholasticism in Vermigli's doctrine of Man and Grace*, Leiden 1976; Luca Baschera, "Aristotle and Scholasticism," in: CPMV, pp. 133-59.

## I. A BRIEF SUMMARY OF MEDIEVAL THINKING ON PROPHECY<sup>13</sup>

Patristic and medieval<sup>14</sup> writers' discussions of prophecy focus on the idea of knowledge of a supernatural character, as is seen in treatments by Augustine,<sup>15</sup> Cassiodorus,<sup>16</sup> and Gregory the Great.<sup>17</sup> Prophecy is discussed in terms of God "elevating the mind to supernatural knowledge (*elevans ad supernaturalem cognitionem*)."<sup>18</sup> Prophecy is divided into kinds. Jerome, for instance, divides prophecy into predestination, foreknowledge and denunciation.<sup>19</sup> Similar divisions appear in the writings of others, such as Peter Lombard, Hugh of St Cher and Thomas Aquinas.<sup>20</sup> Prophecy is also defined according to the mode of prophesying (*secundum modum prophetandi*) as one finds in Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies*, where he distinguishes prophecy as (1) ecstasy; (2) vision; (3) dreams; (4) through a cloud; (5) a voice from heaven; (6) the receiving of an oracle; and (7) being filled with the Holy Spirit.<sup>21</sup> Such divisions appear throughout the Middle Ages; thus one finds both Aquinas and Denis the Carthusian, for instance, discussing the grades or degrees (*gradus*) of prophecy.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> For treatment of major aspects of the topic, see Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages: A Study in Joachimism*, Oxford 1969.

<sup>14</sup> For early thought on, and social context of the rise of, prophecy see Laura Nasrallah, *An Ecstasy of Folly; Prophecy and Authority in Early Christianity*, Cambridge 2003.

<sup>15</sup> In his *de Genesi ad Litteram*, book xii, chapters 6-9, esp. 9 (PL 34: 458-461).

<sup>16</sup> Cassiodorus, *De Prophetia* in his *Psalms praefatio*, PL 70: 12-13; repeated in *Glossa in Prothemata in librum psalmorum*.

<sup>17</sup> *Homélies sur Ézéchiél*, texte Latin. Introduction, traduction et notes par Charles Morel, s.j., Paris 1986, pp. 50-64.

<sup>18</sup> Nicholas of Lyra in "Prohemium" to his postillae on the Psalms in *Lyra Biblia Latina*. See, as well, the *Additiones* and *Replicae* of Paul of Burgos and Matthew Doering, respectively.

<sup>19</sup> *Commentaire sur Saint Matthieu*, texte Latin. Introduction, traduction et notes par Émile Bonnard, Paris 1977, p. 80.

<sup>20</sup> Lombard, *Prologo super Psalmos* (PL 191: 59); Hugh of St Cher "De prophetia" in Jean-Pierre Torrell O.P. (ed.): *Théorie de la prophétie et philosophie de la connaissance aux environs de 1230; La contribution d'Hugues de Saint-Cher (Ms. Douai 434, Question 481)*, Leuven 1977, p. 32; see also, *Aquinas Opera ST II-II q174 a1*.

<sup>21</sup> *Etymologiarum* VII, viii, 32 (PL 82: 283-87; esp 285-87).

<sup>22</sup> *Aquinas Opera ST II-II q174 a3; Denis Psalms*, 3.

Prophetic knowledge is, during the Middle Ages, not always understood as knowledge of the future. It can also be knowledge of the past or the present. It is, in effect, knowledge of what is hidden.<sup>23</sup> Even when it is future contingencies that are in view, prophecy still concerns more than just the obvious notion of the prediction of future events. Thus, Denis the Carthusian, for example, argues that “[p]rophecy contains those things which look to instructing human behavior (*ad mores hominum instruendos*).”<sup>24</sup>

The rise of scholasticism brings the introduction of categories, such as *forma*, *effecta*, and so forth, to the treatment of the topic. It also brings new questions. Is prophecy a *habitus*? Do the prophets see the very essence of God? These and many other *quaestiones* are raised and answered by scholastics. Additionally, there is a taking up and intensifying of the question of who the greatest prophet is. Like Peter Lombard, many argue it was David because he prophesied “on a more exalted and distinguished level (*digniori atque excellentiori modo*),”<sup>25</sup> though Moses was also put forward as the greatest prophet.

Some medieval thinkers clearly believe that prophecy continued into the post-apostolic era.<sup>26</sup> This can be seen in several ways. Jerome, for instance, comments on Matthew 11: 13 (“The prophets and the law prophesied until John”), declaring: “This does not mean that there were no more prophets after John.”<sup>27</sup> This sentiment was

---

<sup>23</sup> Gregory, *Homélies sur Ézéchiél*, 56; *Aquinas Opera* ST II-II q171 a3 (in his *quaestio*: “Whether prophecy is only about future contingencies?”).

<sup>24</sup> *Denis Psalms*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Lombard, *Prologo super Psalmos* (PL 191: 55). Discussion of the figurative character of prophetic knowledge was common, for instance: “[P]rophecy occurs with figurative and enigmatic knowledge (*cum cognitione figurali et aenigmatica*)” (*Aquinas, Expositio in Epistolam I ad Corinthios* 13, in *Aquinas Opera* 13: 263)). Thus David stood out, in the judgment of some, as a prophet who prophesied without these figures but by direct inspiration of the Spirit. Cf. *Aquinas Opera* ST II-II q174 a4 (“Whether Moses was the Greatest of the Prophets”).

<sup>26</sup> See, Niels Christian Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy: The Post-biblical Tradition*, Oxford 2007.

<sup>27</sup> Jerome, *Commentaire sur Saint Matthieu*, 222.

repeated throughout the Middle Ages,<sup>28</sup> and seen to support the post-apostolic continuation of prophecy. Aquinas, for example, notes with respect to these words that “at no time have persons possessing the spirit of prophecy been lacking, not indeed for the declaration of any new doctrine of faith (*non ... ad novam doctrinam fidei depromendam*) but for the direction of human acts.”<sup>29</sup> Further illustration of the belief in the continued existence of prophets in the church will be provided momentarily. Some thinkers, however, held that prophecy had ceased, among whom would seem to be Isidore of Seville.<sup>30</sup>

With regard to the post-apostolic expression of the prophetic gift, later scholasticism saw the rise of several problematic issues. The testing of the prophets, or *discretio spirituum*, becomes a significant concern during this time.<sup>31</sup> This is in part due to the increasing concerns over heresy and to the more frequent and radical claims to prophetic knowledge. Accordingly, the writing of works related to discerning between true and false prophets, an issue for centuries in the church, became increasingly elaborate and sophisticated. It also was the case that this period saw an increase in the number of women claiming to be prophets. In point of fact, these two phenomena are related, as recent scholarship has shown.<sup>32</sup> Finally, the idea of the “poet-prophet” came

---

<sup>28</sup> In the *Glossa Ordinaria*, Hugh of St Cher, Thomas, Denis, etc. See, for instance, the *Glossa* on Matt 11: 13 or *Aquinas Opera* ST II-II q. 174, a.6, ad3.

<sup>29</sup> *Aquinas Opera* ST II-II q. 174, a.6, ad3.

<sup>30</sup> Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiarum* VII, viii, 32 (PL 82: 285).

<sup>31</sup> Scholarly interest in this topic owes a debt to Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: an Enquiry inspired by the Great Witch-hunt*, New York 1975.

<sup>32</sup> On changes in conceptions of history during the Middle Ages, see Marjorie Reeves, *The Prophetic Sense of History in Medieval and Renaissance Europe*, Aldershot 1999. On the *discretio spirituum* and women, see, Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits; Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages*, Ithaca 2003; Rosalynn Voaden, *God's words, Women's Voices; the Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of late-medieval Women Visionaries*, Rochester 1999; Gabriella Zarri, “From prophecy to discipline, 1450-1650,” in Lucetta Scaraffia and Gabriella Zarri (eds): *Women and faith: Catholic Religious Life in Italy from late Antiquity to the Present*, Cambridge 1999, 83-112.

into vogue among renaissance humanists, and was a point of dispute between them and scholastics, as can be seen, for instance, in the opposition it elicited from the Dominican, Girolamo Savonarola.<sup>33</sup>

Medieval thinkers argue for various kinds of prophetic callings. Three of these can briefly be described here by way of summary. The first is the prophetic calling to reveal the future. An enormous category, it includes within it a range of different sub-categories. Predictions of Christ, his kingdom and gospel by biblical prophets loom large under this heading. Yet, even though biblical prophecy had ceased,<sup>34</sup> the Middle Ages still have their share of prophets who predict the future and foretell divine judgment. They often experience visions and dreams and are frequently associated with the apocalyptic. Individuals such as Hildegard of Bingen,<sup>35</sup> Francis of Assisi,<sup>36</sup> and Savonarola<sup>37</sup> immediately come to mind, as does the hugely influential Joachim of Fiore.<sup>38</sup> Some times this predictive prophecy was associated with speculation on the end of the world, at times taking its origins in biblical exegesis.<sup>39</sup> It also appears as prophecies about various personal or local catastrophes<sup>40</sup> or concerning personal

---

<sup>33</sup> See, A.J. Minnis, "Fifteenth Century Versions of Literalism: Girolamo Savonarola and Alfonso de Madrigal" in Robert Lerner (ed.): *Neue Richtungen in der hoch- und spätmittelalterlichen Bibelexegese, Schriften des Historischen Kollegs Kolloquien* 32, Munich 1996, pp. 163-180.

<sup>34</sup> Isidore, *Etymologiarum* VII, viii, 32 (PL 82: 285).

<sup>35</sup> Pope Eugene III acknowledged Hildegard of Bingen as a prophet, as did Bernard of Clairvaux; see Beverly Mayne Kienzle, "Defending the Lord's Vineyard: Hildegard of Bingen's Preaching against the Cathars" in Carolyn Muessig (ed.): *Medieval Monastic Preaching*, Leiden 1998, p. 178.

<sup>36</sup> See Bonaventure asserts St Francis's prophetic gifts in chapter eleven of his "Life of St Francis" in *Doctoris Seraphici S. Bonaventurae ... Opera omnia, edita studio et cura PP. Collegii a S. Bonaventura ad plurimos codices mss. emendata, anecdotis aucta, prolegomenis, scholiis notisque illustrate*, Quaracchi 1882-1902, 8: pp. 535-538.

<sup>37</sup> See Girolamo Savonarola, *Compendio di Rivelazioni; Trattato sul Governo della città di Firenze*, Casale Monferrato 1996, p. 37 *et passim*.

<sup>38</sup> See Bernard McGinn, *The Calabrian Abbot: Joachim of Fiore in the History of Western Thought*, New York 1985.

<sup>39</sup> Lyra on Joel 3: 1-3 (on the valley of Jehoshaphat) in *Lyra Biblia Latina*.

<sup>40</sup> See, *Bonaventura*, 8: 536-538.



guidance and the like.<sup>41</sup> Various forms of natural divination and astrology were also commonplace.<sup>42</sup>

A second category is the calling of prophets as reformers, illustrated by Aquinas in his *expositio* on the Gospel of Matthew:

It ought to be said that the prophets were sent for two reasons: to establish faith and to correct behavior: Prov. 29 : 18: “When prophecy fails, the people are scattered (*dissipabitur*).” To establish the faith, as is said in 1 Peter 1: 10: “Concerning that salvation, the prophets ... .” Thus, prophecy had served two purposes, but now the faith is established (*iam fides fundata est*), since the promises have been fulfilled in Christ. Prophecy that aims to correct behavior (*mores*), however, has not ceased, nor will it ever cease.<sup>43</sup>

Here Aquinas asserts the fact that prophets are directed to be correctors of behavior or reformers. The necessity of this office continues throughout the existence of the church on earth. Aquinas states explicitly that prophecy does not entail the production of new doctrinal truth, but rather the giving of moral guidance. Much the same is seen in comments by Denis the Carthusian: “Prophecy also contains those things which have to do with the instruction of human behavior, such as ‘break your bread with the hungry...’

---

<sup>41</sup> Aquinas, writing on Matthew 11: 13, gives the example of the emperor Theodosius, who sent to a man, John, who dwelt in the desert and was known to have a prophetic spirit, from whom the emperor received a message assuring him of victory (*Aquinas Opera* ST II-II q. 174, a.6, ad3).

<sup>42</sup> See Theodore Wedel, *The Medieval Attitude towards Astrology: Particularly in England*, New Haven 1920; more recently, Laura Ackerman Smoller, *History, Prophecy, and the Stars: The Christian Astrology of Pierre d'Ailly, 1350-1420*, Princeton 1994.

<sup>43</sup> Section 924 in *S. Thomae Aquinatis ... super Evangelium S. Matthaei Lectura*, P. Raphaelis Cai, O.P. (ed.), Taurini 1951, p. 145.

and Micah says ‘he has shown you, man, what is good and what the Lord requires of you.’”<sup>44</sup> That such reforming of the church and Christian mores was common in the later Middle Ages is well known.<sup>45</sup> One thinks of the moral decline of the monasteries, the Avignon papacy, and the rise of groups like the Albigensians, Cathari and the like, in response to which prophets like Hildegard of Bingen,<sup>46</sup> Birgitta of Vadstena,<sup>47</sup> John Wyclif,<sup>48</sup> Jan Hus,<sup>49</sup> and others<sup>50</sup> arose. Often thinking and working within an eschatological or apocalyptic framework, “[t]he motivating factor for each prophet will nearly always be an overwhelming concern with Church reform and the question of renewal.”<sup>51</sup>

Thinkers in antiquity and the Middle Ages also believed the prophetic office entailed being an interpreter and applier of Scripture. Belief in this as a prophetic calling is well established in the history of Christian thinking, being associated specifically with the New Testament office of prophet (based on texts such as Romans 12: 6, 1 Corinthians

---

<sup>44</sup> *Denis Psalms*, 2.

<sup>45</sup> On reform, see Gerhart Ladner, *The Idea of Reform; Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers*, New York 1967; also, *Reform and Renewal in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance Studies in Honor of Louis Pascoe, S.J.*, Thomas M. Izbicki and Christopher M. Bellitto (eds.), Leiden 2000.

<sup>46</sup> See Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, “Prophet and Reformer; ‘Smoke in the Vineyard’” in Barbara Newman (ed.): *Voice of the Living Light: Hildegard of Bingen and Her World*, Berkeley 1998, pp. 70-90.

<sup>47</sup> Ingvar Fogelqvist, *Apostacy and Reform in the Revelations of St. Birgitta*, Stockholm 1993.

<sup>48</sup> See Rodney Petersen, *Preaching in the Last Days: The Theme of the ‘Two Witnesses’ in the 16th and 17th Centuries*, New York 1993, p. 114 n. 133.

<sup>49</sup> Heiko Oberman, “Hus and Luther: Prophets of a Radical Reformation,” in C. Pater and R. Peterson (eds.): *The Contentious Triangle: Church, State, and University*, Kirksville 1999, pp. 135-167.

<sup>50</sup> One could also point to things like the *Apocalypsis Nova* on which see, Anna Morisi-Guerra, “The *Apocalypsis Nova*: A Plan for Reform,” in Marjorie Reeves (ed.): *Prophetic Rome in the High Renaissance Period*, Oxford 1992, pp. 27-50.

<sup>51</sup> Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, *Reformist Apocalypticism and ‘Piers Plowman,’* Cambridge 1990, p. 4. See also Bernard McGinn, “Early Apocalypticism: The Ongoing Debate” in C.A. Patrides and J. Wittreich (eds.): *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature*, Ithaca 1984, pp. 2-39.

12: 10, 28, 1 Corinthians 14: 3, and Ephesians 4: 11).<sup>52</sup> In elaborating upon the character of this prophetic office, it is fairly common for exegetes to argue that the prophets received some kind of divine illumination, which helped them in their understanding of Scripture. It was sometimes explained that this was what distinguished the “prophet” from the “doctor,” the latter having to labor for their understanding of the scriptures. As early as Chrysostom, we discover this distinction,<sup>53</sup> and it is also found in later thinkers, like Nicholas of Lyra.<sup>54</sup> Many medieval thinkers—including Sedulius Scotus, Bruno, Rabanus, Lanfranc, Strabo, Haymo, Pseudo-Jerome, Hugh of St Cher and Aquinas<sup>55</sup>—include within the idea of interpretation the notion of proclamation as well. Concerning the character of the prophet’s proclamation, some thinkers hold that it is doctrinal, others see it as instruction in morals, and others do not comment explicitly on the question. Additionally, some writers argue that the prophet engages in private proclamation while other writers see the office as entailing public proclamation; that is, preaching of the gospel.<sup>56</sup> Still other writers argue that because of the fullness of the revelation which has come with God’s revealing of his Son, it is now the case in the New Testament era that

---

<sup>52</sup> Indeed, some distinguish between Old and New Testament prophets; see, Elsie McKee, *Elders and the Plural Ministry; The Role of Exegetical History in Illuminating John Calvin’s Theology*, Genève 1988, p. 65.

<sup>53</sup> PG 61: 265.

<sup>54</sup> Lyra’s treatment of 1 Corinthians 12: 10 in *Lyra Biblia Latina*, where he comments simply: “second prophets. These are those receiving revelations immediately from God (*accipientes a deo immediate revelationes*).”

<sup>55</sup> Some citations: Bruno (PL 153: 192); Rabanus (PL 112: 116), Lanfranc (PL 150: 199); Strabo (PL 114: 542) and Haymo (PL 117: 580); Pseudo-Jerome (PL 30: 788); Aquinas, *Expositio in Epistolam Romanos* 12: 6 (vol 13, 123); William of St Thierry (PL 180: 673). In contrast, some, like Herveus Burgidolensis, argue for prediction of the future alone (PL 181: 767-768). For additional references to medieval exegetes see, McKee, *Elders*, p. 44, 65. Some thinkers, it should be noted, also included prediction of the future here. Ambrosiaster, for instance: “We may understand prophets to be two kinds, both foretelling the future and revealing the contents of Scripture” (Ambrosiaster, *Divi Ambrosii episcopi Mediolanensis omnia ...*, Basileae, A. Petri, 1516, 2, f 208 v° as cited by McKee, *Elders*, p. 65).

<sup>56</sup> John Thompson, *John Calvin and the Daughters of Sarah; Women in Regular and Exceptional Roles in the Exegesis of Calvin, his Predecessors, and his Contemporaries*, Genève 1992, pp. 190-197.

*all* Christians are prophets and thus, now, *all* can rightfully take up the work of teaching. This is articulated, for instance, by Martin Luther.<sup>57</sup> But whether all Christians were believed to be prophets or not, certainly some form of prophetic interpretive ministry was seen by many ancient and medieval interpreters to continue into the New Testament, and specifically the post-apostolic, era. Thus, the influential Ambrosiaster writes on this topic:

Prophets, however, are those who explain the scriptures. In the beginning, there were, though, prophets such as Agabus and the four virgins who prophesied, as is found in the Acts of the Apostles [21: 9]. This was for the purpose of commending the beginnings of the faith [Acts 7: 2ff]. Now, however, those who interpret scripture are called «prophets» (*nunc autem interpretes prophetarum dicuntur*).<sup>58</sup>

This summary has set forth briefly the background that informed thinking on the prophetic office during the Early Modern era and, by extension, the thinking of Peter Martyr Vermigli.<sup>59</sup>

## II. VERMIGLI'S VIEWS ON PROPHECY<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> "Commentary on Genesis" in WA 43: 136-37; LW 3: 364 as cited by Thompson, *John Calvin and the Daughters of Sarah*, p. 199.

<sup>58</sup> Ambrosiaster, f. 242 v<sup>o</sup> as cited by McKee, *Elders*, p. 139.

<sup>59</sup> For Vermigli's knowledge of the fathers, see David F. Wright, "Exegesis and Patristic Authority," in: CPMV, pp. 117-30; and for his knowledge of scholasticism, see, Baschera (n. 12), pp. 133-59; especially, pp. 151-58.

<sup>60</sup> There is brief coverage of Vermigli's views on prophecy in Robert Kingdon, "Ecclesiology: Exegesis and Discipline," in: CPMV, pp. 379-380. Also: Jason Zuidema, *Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499-1562)*

It is noteworthy that Vermigli felt strongly enough about the subject of prophecy to produce two loci on it. The first is found in his commentary on Genesis, based on lectures given between 1542 and 1547 during his first stint in Strasbourg.<sup>61</sup> The second, and more substantial locus, appears in his commentary on 1 Samuel 19, based on lectures given while in Zurich after 1556. Vermigli also produces lectures on Romans and 1 Corinthians. In doing so, he discusses prophets when treating Romans 12: 6 and various portions of 1 Corinthians 12 and 14. These lectures were given while in Oxford, between the years 1548 and 1549 (for 1 Corinthians) and 1550 and 1552 (for Romans). If one looks at his *Loci Communes*, one finds the two aforementioned loci from Genesis and 1 Samuel. This material appears in chapter three of part one, which is a chapter devoted to the topic of prophecy. His comments on New Testament references to prophecy (such as those on Romans 12: 6 and 1 Corinthians 14: 3, 26-33) are not included in this material. The ensuing analysis is based on an examination of these portions of Vermigli's biblical commentaries.

When examining Vermigli's handling of prophecy, particularly in his two loci on the topic, one of the first things one notices is how similar his treatment is to medieval models, especially those produced by late scholastic thinkers, with respect to both approach and content.

---

and the Outward Instruments of Divine Grace. Gottingen 2008, pp. 98, 107, 118. More considerable coverage is found in, Thompson, *John Calvin and the Daughters of Sarah*, pp. 193-96; also *idem*, "Patriarchy and Prophetesses: Tradition and Innovation in Vermigli's Doctrine of Woman" in Frank A. James III (ed.): *Peter Martyr Vermigli and the European Reformations*, Leiden 2004, pp. 139-58, especially pp. 152-58.

<sup>61</sup> Information on Vermigli's writings was gleaned from John Patrick Donnelly (compiler), *A Bibliography of the Works of Peter Martyr Vermigli*, Kirksville 1990.

Considering Vermigli's approach, one sees that he employs standard medieval categories<sup>62</sup> for his examination of the subject. Thus, he examines the causes of prophecy (*causas*), the form (*forma prophetiae*), the end (*prophetiae finis*), its origin (*origo prophetiae*), the definition (*definitionem*), the grades of prophecy (*prophetarum gradus*), the properties (*proprietates*), and prophecy's effects (*prophetiae effecta*). Additionally, Vermigli's treatment in his two loci is replete with *quaestiones*, such as: Whether God coerces his prophets? Whether those inspired by God know what they are saying? Whether those inspired by God know what they are doing? How can women prophesy since they are not permitted to speak in church? How are good prophets distinguished from bad? Whether the prophets are sure of the things which they prophesy? Whether miracles are prophecies? In terms, then, of the approach and general structure of Vermigli's treatment, they are scholastic.

Concerning content, Vermigli concurs with many medieval thinkers in conceiving prophecy in terms of knowledge. The form of prophecy, he argues, is revelation (*revelatio Dei*).<sup>63</sup> He insists that prophets learn not by instruction, study and labor, but by divine revelation. This is, in fact, the first thing he mentions in comments on 1 Corinthians 12: 28 when explaining what distinguishes *prophetas* from *doctores*.<sup>64</sup> His handling of the nature of this knowledge is also medieval in character. Prophetic knowledge, Vermigli asserts, is knowledge of what is hidden, whether it be future,

---

<sup>62</sup> These categories—technical terms which developed in the Middle Ages—can be seen in various genres of medieval writing, such as biblical commentaries; see, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c. 1100-c. 1375*, A.J. Minnis, A.B. Scott and David Wallace (eds.), Oxford 1988, and A.J. Minnis, *Medieval theory of authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*, London 1984.

<sup>63</sup> PMV Sam, 111r.

<sup>64</sup> PMV Cor, 182r.

present, or past.<sup>65</sup> Here he sounds almost exactly like Gregory the Great. Vermigli also distinguishes this knowledge into levels or grades (*gradus*); a discussion which includes remarks on oracles, dreams, and visions.<sup>66</sup>

Vermigli's definition of prophecy also reflects qualities which one may legitimately associate with the broad contours of medieval thought on prophecy discussed earlier. His definition of prophecy is found in the locus from his 1 Samuel commentary.

Prophecy is a faculty (*facultas*) given to certain people by the Spirit of God without teaching or learning, whereby they are able to know with certainty heavenly things, high and secret, and to expound them to others for the edification of the church. Here faculty is the general word for prophecy (*genus est facultas*): Prophecy is able to be referred to as a natural power, not because the power is natural but because it makes people fit, as a natural power does (*idoneos, ut potentia naturalis facit*), that they may possess assured knowledge. I therefore added it to the definition, because those who utter things which they do not understand are mad men rather than prophets.<sup>67</sup>

Similarly illuminating in this regard is Vermigli's discussion of the power of prophecy. In treating the prophecy of Abraham and Abimelech (in a locus from the Genesis commentary), Vermigli notes that their power was not of themselves. This prompts him to argue that the power of prophecy is not to be considered a *habitus* but rather a

---

<sup>65</sup> PMV Gen, 80v; PMV Cor 182v.

<sup>66</sup> PMV Sam, 111v-112r.

<sup>67</sup> PMV Sam, 111v.

preparation (*praeparatio*), or, “as they term it” (Vermigli says), disposition (*dispositio*).<sup>68</sup> Continuing, he discusses the nature of the “heavenly light” which enlightens the prophet’s mind. It is:

... more like a passion (*passio*), as that which may easily be removed, than like a passible quality (*passibilis qualitas*). It is like a light in the air, but not like the light of celestial bodies and not like the paleness arising from a natural body. Rather it is like that which arises from a sudden frightening of the mind (*perterrefacto animo exoritur*).<sup>69</sup>

Here Vermigli discusses the nature of the prophetic disposition—or the reception of prophecy—with an inquisitiveness and speculation which is impressive for its penetration. His speculations highlight the concern Vermigli has for knowledge. For him, one of the key qualities of the prophet is the knowledge revealed to them, which (again) underscores the scholastic emphasis of Vermigli’s treatment.

In his treatment, Vermigli addresses two issues common to late-medieval discussions of prophecy. (1) the discerning of spirits, and (2) women prophets. On the first, we find him writing in his locus from 1 Samuel quite a substantial section on good (*boni*) and false (*mali*) prophets under the rubric of distinguishing between the two; i.e. the testing of the prophets (*prophetiae probandae*).<sup>70</sup> The same is true of his handling of 1 Corinthians 12: 10.<sup>71</sup> In the former, his thought includes comments on the fact that

---

<sup>68</sup> PMV Gen, 80v.

<sup>69</sup> PMV Gen, 80v.

<sup>70</sup> PMV Sam, 112r-v.

<sup>71</sup> PMV Cor, 173v-174r.



those who are evil prophets can still proclaim what is true; not surprisingly, Balaam is his example. It also includes a quite substantial section in which Vermigli discusses the marks (*notae*) by which the false prophets can be distinguished from the true.<sup>72</sup> It is not simply through considering their attire, he argues: rather, the scriptures set forth more sure signs. He notes two points set out in Deuteronomy; first, that the prophet does not lead people away to practice idolatry; and second, that the prophet's predictions always come true.<sup>73</sup> In analyzing these, Vermigli concedes that the interpretation of the second point is somewhat doubtful. By way of explanation, he points out that Isaiah's prediction that Hezekiah would die did not in fact occur, and Jonah's prophecy that Nineveh would be destroyed also did not come to pass.<sup>74</sup> He goes on to explain that these were not so much prophecies as divine threats, and that when the condition which prompted the threat was remedied, the threat was removed. Continuing, Vermigli examines two marks which are set down by Chrysostom for identifying false prophets, before moving on to introduce another point about the prophets of the devil, namely, that the devil often drives his prophets to hang themselves. Vermigli produces the examples of Prisca and Maxilla.<sup>75</sup> The devil also moved the prophets of Baal to injure themselves. These observations are developed by the Florentine into a discussion of the way in which the devil and the Holy Spirit differ in their treatment of their prophets. Vermigli acknowledges that God's Spirit compels his prophets, in a certain sense, to the fulfillment of their callings—he points to Moses, Jonah and Jeremiah, all of whom were reluctant to take up God's charge.<sup>76</sup> While the devil compels with violence, this the Spirit of God does not do. Some further

---

<sup>72</sup> PMV Sam, 112r-112v.

<sup>73</sup> PMV Sam, 112r.

<sup>74</sup> PMV Sam, 112r-112v.

<sup>75</sup> PMV Sam, 112v.

<sup>76</sup> PMV Sam, 112v.

reflections on the ways of the Spirit and of the devil with their prophets continues for a short time longer, with Vermigli citing 1 Corinthians 14: 43 and 1 Corinthians 12: 3 to argue both that the spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets and that the true prophet confesses Jesus and cannot deny him.<sup>77</sup> These points, Vermigli argues, provide a summary of the tokens which distinguish true from false prophets. Continuing the discussion further, he treats what it means for one to confess the Lord Jesus, noting that one must not confess him in word only but also in truth. This leads Vermigli to discuss the way in which the prophets are moved by the Spirit of God to prophesy. Here he cites the well-known passage from 2 Peter 1: 21 and refers to the examples of Amos and Daniel.<sup>78</sup> A significant amount of attention is paid by Vermigli to this issue of the *discretio spirituum*.

The second subject is the question of women prophets. In raising the topic, Vermigli immediately asserts that God did not deny this gift to women, mentioning Mary, Deborah and Olda and other godly women in the primitive church.<sup>79</sup> He then, however, raises the Pauline injunctions concerning women covering their head when prophesying (1 Cor 11: 5) and women remaining silent in church (1 Cor 14: 34). Acknowledging that these texts raise difficulties for one wishing to possess a right understanding of prophecy, Vermigli then runs through four different ways of resolving the difficulties before asserting that it is not his intention here to draw a firm conclusion on the issue. He only wishes, he explains, to point out that God does from time to time impart the gift of prophecy to women.<sup>80</sup> Thus ends his treatment of the subject in this locus. Vermigli,

---

<sup>77</sup> PMV Sam, 112v.

<sup>78</sup> PMV Sam, 113r.

<sup>79</sup> PMV Sam, 112r.

<sup>80</sup> PMV Sam, 112r.

however, has other things to say on women prophets. In fact, it is on this subject of Vermigli's position on women prophets that the fine studies of John Thompson are focused.<sup>81</sup> We will not take issue here with anything Thompson says in his treatment on that specific subject. We will observe, though, that Thompson's focus on Vermigli's thought on the specific question of the prophetess and on specific New Testament (and usually Pauline) passages, such as 1 Corinthians 11: 5 and 14: 34, sets boundaries on the usefulness of his findings such that they cannot really be taken to present an exposition of Vermigli's position on the office of prophet but, rather, only an exposition of what Vermigli thought of women prophets, and issues related to them. This is not intended as a criticism, since that was precisely Thompson's objective.<sup>82</sup> This being so, it will not be surprising to find that there are nonetheless significant aspects of Vermigli's position on the prophetic office which are not discussed by Thompson.

### III. VERMIGLI, THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH, AND THE CLOSING OF THE PROPHETIC OFFICE

---

<sup>81</sup> Thompson, *John Calvin and the Daughters of Sarah* (n. 56), pp. 193-96 and idem, "Patriarchy and Prophetesses" (n. 60), pp. 152-58.

<sup>82</sup> In both studies, Thompson engages with different views of prophecy held by various ancient, medieval and Early Modern exegetes. In his study on Calvin, Thompson sets out four readings of "prophecy" in the New Testament, as understood by Calvin and his contemporaries – one of whom is, of course, Vermigli. The four readings are prophecy (1) as receiving proclamation; (2) as private proclamation; (3) as public proclamation; (4) mixed options on what prophecy is. Thompson ascribes the third reading to Vermigli, but (again) this is done specifically with relation to the topic of women prophets (see, *John Calvin and the Daughters of Sarah* (n. 56), pp. 193-97). In "Patriarchy and Prophetesses," Thompson takes up Vermigli's thought on Old Testament examples, such as Deborah, while also looking at his treatment of passages like 1 Corinthians 11: 5 and the case of women prophets in the New Testament. Yet, once more, the fairly precise focus of Thompson's analysis—while fascinating and extremely well done—limits the benefit of his research as regards the question of Vermigli's understanding of the prophetic office considered more generally (see, Thompson, "Patriarchy and Prophetesses" (n. 60), pp. 152-58).

Along with exhibiting scholastic themes, Vermigli's thought also betrays its own idiosyncrasies, particularly (I will argue) as it interacts with his contemporary situation. Indeed, one of the more impressive aspects of his position on prophecy relates to his reading of redemptive history—specifically, the line of demarcation which Vermigli draws between the apostolic and post-apostolic eras and the effect this has on his understanding of prophecy. In a word, Vermigli sets out a position which excludes the existence of prophets in the post-apostolic era, at least in terms of any ordinary kind of prophetic ministry within the church. One can see this implied, for instance, in Vermigli's locus on prophecy from 1 Samuel. There he asserts that there is, in the case of prophecy, a discrimination of times (*discrimina temporum*).<sup>83</sup> Elaborating on this, Vermigli notes that there were prophets before the law—"Abraham, Noah, Enoch and Adam"—prophets during the time of the law—"such as Moses and others"—and prophets during the gospel era—"such as the prophecies of many holy men during the time of the primitive church (*sanctorum virorum in primitiva Ecclesia*)."<sup>84</sup> At this point, Vermigli's discussion turns to other issues. He treats the question of the contemporary existence of prophets, as if it were not even a remote possibility; as if one can take for granted that there is no such thing as prophecy following the era of the primitive church. This locus from 1 Samuel is, it will be recalled, a later writing (from the 1550s). His position on this issue is more explicit in earlier pieces, for example in his Genesis commentary.<sup>85</sup>

The argument in the locus from Genesis 20 is two-pronged. First, Vermigli sets forth plainly a case that the office of prophet existed during the period up to and

---

<sup>83</sup> PMV Sam, 112r.

<sup>84</sup> PMV Sam, 112r. See a similar reading in his exposition of 1 Corinthians 12: 28, PMV Cor, 82v.

<sup>85</sup> See, PMV Gen, 81r.

including the era of the primitive Christian church but has now become useless to the church. Vermigli makes his argument for this view clear at the end of this locus when he discusses the existence of prophets during the period of the primitive church. He mentions, as examples of prophets, Peter, who knew the hearts of Ananias and Sapphira, Agabus, and a few others. As he continues, the clear burden of Vermigli's treatment is to show that prophets have sufficiently served their purpose. Prophets, he explicitly states, "are not needed today."<sup>86</sup> The gospel has spread far and wide, Vermigli says, and so prophets are no longer required but rather teachers. Vermigli, as mentioned earlier, compares prophets to healings, tongues and delivering over to Satan to make his point. These actions have been replaced now, and thus prophecy has been too.<sup>87</sup> Teachers (*doctores*), who can instruct the people, are now what the church requires. This, then, marks the first phase of Vermigli's argument for the cessation of the prophetic office.

In the next phase, he asserts explicitly that teachers (*doctores*) are not rightly called prophets (*prophetae*). "It cannot be proved from Scripture that [teachers] are called prophets, unless (*nisi*) they have spoken some secret mysteries by the inspiration of God without the care and endeavor of human learning."<sup>88</sup> The Italian's words here give the distinct (one could justifiably say, *certain*) impression that he is arguing directly against a position which is current; a position which, in his judgment, wrongly blurs the distinction between the office of prophet and that of teacher. Against this, Vermigli declares emphatically that prophets receive divine revelation of mysteries while teachers

---

<sup>86</sup> "Quare prophetae tunc maxime visi sunt necessarii, modo non item ... Idcirco modo non est prophetia adeo necessaria, sicut et sanitatum gratia, cum iam Ecclesia habet medicos ..." (PMV Gen, 81r).

<sup>87</sup> PMV Gen, 81r.

<sup>88</sup> "... nisi prae dixerint occulta afflati spiritu, non addita humana discendi solitudine" (PMV Gen, 81r).

of the scriptures do not.<sup>89</sup> Thus, unless one finds individuals who receive divine revelation of mysteries in Vermigli's day, one does not find prophets in his day.

Vermigli continues to press his point by declaring that although Christ promised there would be such gifts (*istis charismatis*)—by which he clearly means extraordinary gifts such as prophecy, healing, and so forth—in Christ's church; Christ did not promise that the church would perpetually enjoy these gifts.<sup>90</sup> This, then, is Vermigli's argument in his locus on prophecy from the Genesis commentary.

At this point, one may wonder what Vermigli does with the Pauline texts which mention prophecy and (also) what happened to the scholastic idea of the prophet as interpreter. Many of Vermigli's fellow reformers understand these texts as sanctioning a continuation of the prophetic office. Martin Luther asserts this position<sup>91</sup> as does Philip Melancthon.<sup>92</sup> Zwingli's reading of 1 Corinthians 14 (v. 29, "Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the others judge") in establishing a prophetic model of ministry and Zurich's *Prophezei* has already been mentioned.<sup>93</sup> Heinrich Bullinger asserts on 1 Corinthians 14: 3 that Paul understands by prophecy here "not the prediction of the future but the interpretation of the holy scriptures."<sup>94</sup> Surely influential in the proliferation of such views was Desiderius Erasmus, whose 1516 annotations on 1 Corinthians 14: 1 read

---

<sup>89</sup> PMV Gen, 81r.

<sup>90</sup> PMV Gen, 81r.

<sup>91</sup> "To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools" in WA 15: 40; LW 45: 363.

<sup>92</sup> *Commentarius in epist. Ad Corinthios* 12: 28 in CR 15: 1133-34. Melancthon expands slightly more on the subject of prophecy in comments on Romans 12: 6 in which he explains that the right interpretation of Scripture "requires some revelation (*opus est aliqua revelatio*)" (CR 15: 708 from his *Commentarii in epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*).

<sup>93</sup> See n. 8 and 9. On the *Prophezei* meetings, see, *inter alia*, Denis, "La prophétie" (n. 10), pp. 289-316 ; G.R. Potter, *Zwingli*, Cambridge 1976, pp. 221-24; Bruce Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation*, Manchester 2002, 232-238.

<sup>94</sup> "*Prophetiam vero non praedictionem rerum futurarum, sed interpretationem scripturae sanctae intellexit*" (*In priorem d. Pauli ad Corinthios epistolam, Henrichi Bullingeri commentaries*, Zurich: Apud Christoph. Froscho 1534, 170v).

in a manner almost identical to what is found in the later, remarks from Bullinger just-cited.<sup>95</sup> But whether one credits Erasmus or not, similar assertions can be found in the writings of numerous individuals, including Johann Bugenhagen,<sup>96</sup> Matthias Illyricus,<sup>97</sup> Johannes Brenz,<sup>98</sup> Rudolf Gwalther,<sup>99</sup> Caspar Olevianus,<sup>100</sup> and John Calvin.<sup>101</sup> How, then, do Vermigli's readings compare with these?

Vermigli's reading of the relevant Pauline passages, in effect, reiterates the prophet-teacher distinction. He argues that there is a basic difference between teachers and prophets and that Paul is simply talking in these passages about teachers. In treating 1 Corinthians 12: 10, Vermigli actually argues that "prophecy" refers to predicting the future,<sup>102</sup> but on the other relevant Pauline passages, the Florentine understands the Apostle as referring simply to the ordinary ministry of the word (*ad verbi ministerium*). In fact, when in his locus from the Genesis 20 commentary Vermigli declares that it cannot be proved from Scripture that teachers are called prophets, he adds to the portion we cited earlier, "unless (*nisi*) you are willing to twist the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians."<sup>103</sup> The idea that Paul is simply referring to the ministry of the word is set

---

<sup>95</sup> *Novum instrumentum*, 1516; reprint, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt 1986, p. 477 as cited in Max Engammare, "Calvin: A Prophet without a Prophecy," in: *Church History* 67/4 (1998), pp. 643-661, esp. p. 648.

<sup>96</sup> *Annotationes Ioan. Bugenhagii Pomerani in X. epistolas Pauli, scilicet, ad Ephesios, ... Hebraeos*, Strassburg: Apud Iohannem Hervagium 1524, 13r.

<sup>97</sup> See Olivier Millet, "Eloquence des prophètes bibliques et prédication inspirée: la 'prophétie' réformée au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle," in: *Prophètes et prophétie au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris 1998, pp. 65-82.

<sup>98</sup> Johannes Brenz, *In Epistolam, quam apostolus Paulus ad Romanos scripsit, commentariorum libri tres*, Tübingen: Georgius Gruppenbachius 1588, p. 723.

<sup>99</sup> Rudolf Gwalther, *In D. Pauli Apostoli Epistolam ad Romanos Homiliae XCVI*, Zurich: In Officina Froschoviana 1590, 163v.

<sup>100</sup> *In epistolam D. Pauli Apostoli ad Romanos notae, ex Gasparis Oleviani concionibus excerptae, & a Theodoro Beza editae ...*, Geneva: Apud Eustathium Vignon 1579, p. 614.

<sup>101</sup> *Iohannis Calvini Commentarius in epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*, T.H.L. Parker (ed.), Leiden 1981, p. 270; CO 49: 507 (on Romans 12: 6, 1 Corinthians 12:28, respectively).

<sup>102</sup> PMV Cor, 82v.

<sup>103</sup> PMV Gen, 81r; also: "*interpretes divinarum literarum dicebantur prophetae*" (PMV Sam, 111r).

out in Vermigli's treatment of 1 Corinthians 14: 3, 26-32<sup>104</sup> and his handling of Romans 12: 6.<sup>105</sup> His reading of the latter is rather unique and worthy of notice. On this text, Vermigli notes that while in the primitive church era there were many who were gifted by God to foretell the future (i.e. prophets—Peter, Agabus, etc), this is not what Paul has in mind here. Paul, says Vermigli, is only describing those offices which are perpetually needed (*necessaria*) in the church.<sup>106</sup> What Paul is doing, says Vermigli, is setting out two general offices or functions (*duo ... munera proponi generaliter*), which the Apostle then divides into parts in the remainder of the verse.<sup>107</sup> In Vermigli's judgment, "prophecy" functions in tandem with "ministry" (citing the Greek, *diaconia*) which is also mentioned early in Romans 12: 6, directly after referencing "prophecy." Paul sets out these two general offices, Vermigli argues, because humankind consists of two parts, body and soul. The two words indicate that God is concerned for both human souls and human bodies. "Ministry" covers the body, "prophecy" the soul. In Vermigli's opinion, the word "prophecy" as it appears in Romans 12: 6 embraces the gifts (*propheta complectitur dona*),<sup>108</sup> which are mentioned later in the verse, namely of teaching and

---

<sup>104</sup> On 1 Cor 14: 3: "*Prophetia vero maiorem afferebat utilitatem, quod ad verbi ministerium accederet maxime.*" (PMV Cor, 106v). More on his handling of 1 Cor 14: 26-33, especially 29-31 (PMV Cor, 205r-207r) will be mentioned later.

<sup>105</sup> PMV Rom, 1346.

<sup>106</sup> PMV Rom, 1346. It is precisely Vermigli's conviction that Paul treats here of matters which are necessary to the church that distinguishes the Italian's exposition of passages like Romans 12: 6 and 1 Corinthians 14: 3 from passages like 1 Corinthians 11: 5, which Thompson treats in *John Calvin and the Daughters of Sarah* (n. 56), pp. 193-96 and idem, "Patriarchy and Prophetesses" (n. 60), pp. 152-58. In handling these passages which discuss women prophets, Vermigli, as Thompson points out, views women as possessing *extraordinary* roles in the church; that is, roles which do not continue and are not necessary to the church.

<sup>107</sup> PMV Rom, 1346.

<sup>108</sup> PMV Rom, 1346.



exhortation. Paul is, then, the Florentine argues, simply referring to the ordinary teaching office.<sup>109</sup>

Thus, while Vermigli follows his predecessors and contemporaries in a number of important ways, he does not concur with those who hold that the New Testament prophetic office continues into the post-apostolic church. For Vermigli, in fact, the prophetic office ceased to function following the church's primitive era.<sup>110</sup> Yet this is not all he says on the question of the continuation of prophecy.

#### IV. VERMIGLI ON GOD'S RAISING UP OF PROPHETS IN THE POST-APOSTOLIC ERA

In his locus from the Genesis commentary based on lectures given in Strasbourg between 1542 and 1547, Vermigli declares: "In my judgment it ought not to be denied that there still are prophets in the church, though not so illustrious as in antiquity."<sup>111</sup> Nothing of significance follows this brief declaration. Of course, there was little surprising about it. The Early Modern era was not without prophets. Not only "radicals," like Melchior Hoffmann<sup>112</sup> or Thomas Müntzer,<sup>113</sup> and Roman Catholics, like Meister

---

<sup>109</sup> Vermigli does, later on in his exposition of this text, refer to prophecy as a general office (*generale munus*), but, again it is clear that he is not treating it as if Paul had in his mind a specific church office of prophet. PMV Rom, 1346.

<sup>110</sup> PMV Gen, 81r.

<sup>111</sup> "*Quamvis non est meo iudicio negandum, adhuc in Ecclesia prophetas esse, sed non admodum claros, ut antequam fuerunt*" (PMV Gen, 81r).

<sup>112</sup> Klaus Deppermann, *Melchior Hoffman. Soziale Unruhen und apokalyptische Visionen im Zeitalter der Reformation*, Göttingen 1979; ET: Klaus Deppermann, Malcolm Wren (trans.), *Melchior Hoffman: Social Unrest and Apocalyptic Visions in the Age of Reformation*, Edinburgh 1987.

<sup>113</sup> Hans-Jürgen Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer. Mystiker, Apokalyptiker, Revolutionär*, München 1989; ET: Hans-Jürgen Goertz, Jocelyn Jacquierey (trans.), *Thomas Müntzer: Apocalyptic Mystic and Revolutionary*, Edinburgh 1993.

Theodorus<sup>114</sup> or Maria de Santo Domingo,<sup>115</sup> but also Vermigli's own colleagues, with individuals like Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin<sup>116</sup> being identified as such by their contemporaries. Bullinger identifies a "company of prophets" in one of his sermons on Revelation (preached in the early 1530s and published in 1537), listing "Mirandola, Reuchlin, Erasmus, Luther, Zwingli, Oecolampadius, and Melanchthon."<sup>117</sup> But what of Vermigli? What is to be made of Vermigli's remark on the continuation of prophets given his negative judgment of the question in what has been covered heretofore?

First, the specific character of Vermigli's prophets may be examined. He seems to hold that they are temporary and called during a time of crisis, for he states:

If the ordinary ministry at any time (*quando*) does not fulfill their duty, God raises up prophets extraordinarily (*extra ordinem*) in order to restore things to order.<sup>118</sup>

His comment is a brief one, and unsubstantiated. Brief though it may be, this seems nevertheless to be part of Vermigli's explanation of how prophets might exist in his day despite the clear, forceful argument which he set out for the cessation of the prophetic office. In other words, it would appear that Vermigli believes that God has brought an end to the office of the prophet but that He can, and does, raise up prophets *extra ordinem* when the church has special need of them. The character of this need is addressed when

---

<sup>114</sup> Robert E. Lerner, "Medieval Prophecy and Religious Dissent," in: *Past & Present* 72 (1976), pp. 3-24.

<sup>115</sup> Jodi Bilinkoff, "A Spanish Prophetess and Her Patrons: The Case of Maria de Santo Domingo," in: *Sixteenth Century Journal* 23 (1992), pp. 21-34.

<sup>116</sup> See, respectively, Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther as Prophet, Teacher, and Hero; Images of the Reformer, 1520-1620*, Grand Rapids 1999; G.R. Potter, *Zwingli* (n. 93), pp. 221-24; Alexandre Ganoczy, *Le Jeune Calvin: Genèse et évolution de sa vocation réformatrice*, Stuttgart 1966, pp. 336-368.

<sup>117</sup> Heinrich Bullinger, *In Apocalypsim conciones centum*, Basel: Johannes Oporin 1557, p. 148 as cited by Petersen, *Preaching in the Last Days* (n. 48), p. 149.

<sup>118</sup> PMV Sam, 113r.

Vermigli points to the failure of the ordinary ministry. God, he says, raises up these prophets to reform the church when such a failure has occurred. This, in a word, is Vermigli's position on prophets in his own day, and, in point of fact, it would seem that he shares this view with Calvin as well.<sup>119</sup>

Second, Vermigli holds that the work accomplished by these contemporary prophets focuses on rightly interpreting the Scripture and correcting widespread moral lapse. This is what he refers to when he says, "in order to restore things to order (*res instaurent*)."<sup>120</sup> Vermigli does not countenance anything approaching the idea that these prophets produce new doctrinal revelation, but rather, he sees them as raised up by God to do what the ordinary teaching ministry should be doing but is not, namely, *rightly* interpreting, teaching, and applying God's will to his church. These prophets, then, differ from ordinary interpreters of the scriptures. They are authoritative interpreters raised up to reform a church in crisis.<sup>121</sup> That Vermigli has in mind here (for Early Modern prophets) the major figures raised up during the sixteenth-century Reformation seems likely.

## V. VERMIGLI ON PROPHECY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE 1540s AND 1550s

What, then, is behind the construction of his thinking on this locus? The bigger question of why it is that Vermigli deals with the office of prophecy in this positive light can now be considered. We know that in Zurich and Strasbourg prophetic models of

---

<sup>119</sup> See, for instance, CO 43: 333-334 (lecture on Micah 3: 11-12). See Jon Balserak, *Establishing the Remnant Church in France; Calvin's Lectures on the Minor Prophets, 1556-1559*, Leiden 2011, 65-107.

<sup>120</sup> PMV Sam, 113r.

<sup>121</sup> See Melancthon's thoughts on Luther in *Commentaries in epist. Ad Coriinthios* 12: 28 in CR 15: 1133-34; also generally on Romans 12: 6 in *Commentarii in epistolam Pauli ad Romanos hoc anno M.D.XL. recogniti & locupletati*, Strassburg: Apud Cratonem Mylium 1540, p. 288.

ministry and schools (for example in the *Prophezei*) were well established by the time of Vermigli's arrival.<sup>122</sup> We also know that at this time in both cities, and in England too,<sup>123</sup> the reformers labored diligently against Anabaptists and were still troubled by them. In the case of Zurich, for example, Robert Bast notes that by 1526 not only did Conrad Grebel, Felix Mantz, and George Blaurock begin to call themselves prophets and publicly denounce Zwingli as a false prophet, but also that "[d]ozens of laymen and women with enough literacy to read the German Bible and an avowed sense of God's call were insisting on the right to preach."<sup>124</sup> Likewise, with regard to Strasbourg, Miriam Chrisman and Thomas A. Brady, Jr. demonstrate the kinds of struggles that the city endured with Anabaptism, pointing to the steady stream of radicals including Clement Ziegler, Michael Sattler, Pilgrim Marpeck, Melchior Hoffmann, and Sebastian Franck who encouraged a significant dissenting presence in the city. Strasbourg could, of course, be said to have turned a corner in 1533-1534 when it, through synods, enforced a doctrinal consensus, forcing dissenters to leave the city. Nonetheless, the threat and problem of Anabaptism was still real into the 1540s and 1550s.<sup>125</sup> Thus, these radical elements were a significant concern for the reformers, and a problem which was only made worse for Zurich by the death of Zwingli in 1531 and Leo Jud in 1542 and for

---

<sup>122</sup> See works cited in n. 10.

<sup>123</sup> Joseph Walford Martin, *Religious Radicals in Tudor England*, London 1989.

<sup>124</sup> Bast, "Constructing Protestant Identity," (n. 6), pp. 359.

<sup>125</sup> See, Chrisman, *Strasbourg and the Reform; A Study in the Process of Change*, New Haven 1967, pp. 177-200; idem, *Lay Culture, Learned Culture; Books and Social Change in Strasbourg, 1480-1599*, New Haven 1982, pp. 144-150 et passim; Thomas A. Brady, Jr., *Ruling Class, Regime and Reformation at Strasbourg, 1520-1555*, Leiden 1978, pp. 236-258.

Strasbourg by the demise of Wolfgang Capito<sup>126</sup> in 1541, not to mention Calvin's departure from Strasbourg in the same year.

Vermigli, of course, fled Italy in 1542, to live in Strasbourg, England, and ultimately Zurich, and it is impossible that he could have avoided the Anabaptists in any of these places. Nor are we left merely with this bald assertion. For, the presence of his struggles with, and disapproval of, radical views can be seen in various places in his lectures on prophecy. Vermigli, for example, sets out a considerable amount in his second locus, from the 1 Samuel lectures, on the discerning of the spirits in direct relation to the discerning of false prophets (*prophetae mali*).<sup>127</sup> His handling of this subject makes it clear that he considers it timely and something which his hearers should take very seriously, though he does not identify who these false prophets are.<sup>128</sup> More specific is the material found in his locus *de prophetia* from his lectures on Genesis, where one finds Vermigli insisting (as we saw earlier) that teachers are not rightly called prophets and, in fact, that anyone who thinks that they are and that they have support in this position from the apostle Paul is guilty of twisting the Scriptures. Vermigli follows this observation with his remarks about the fact that Jesus did *not* promise such gifts as prophecy to the church perpetually. In making these points, Vermigli seems to have plainly had a specific local view or group in mind, against which he is disagreeing. While it is true that his remarks here could perhaps apply to individuals like Zwingli or Bullinger, it is far more likely (given his manifest respect for them) that he had in mind

---

<sup>126</sup> On Capito's flirtation with Anabaptism, which ended in 1531, see, Chrisman, *Strasbourg and the Reform*, 187-189.

<sup>127</sup> PMV Sam, 112r.

<sup>128</sup> PMV Sam, 112r-112v.

the Anabaptists.<sup>129</sup> More specific still is the material found in his lectures on 1 Corinthians 14: 29-32, which provides further evidence of Vermigli's struggles, and in which he specifically identifies the Anabaptists as his antagonists. When addressing Paul's words "For you can all prophesy one by one (*Potestis enim singulatim omnes prophetare*<sup>130</sup>)" (1 Cor 14: 31), Vermigli treats the two interrelated questions of who can speak in church and how order can be maintained within the church. He mentions Rome's charge that the reformers have destroyed all order through their raising of objections against Roman Catholic traditions and doctrines. And even with Rome's accusation in full view of all, Vermigli still turns to lambaste the Anabaptists for doing this very thing. They, Vermigli complains, use this Pauline text as grounds for their endeavor to disturb and overturn all things. They acknowledge no order in the church (*ordinem in Ecclesia nullum*)<sup>131</sup> and would destroy the church if they were allowed to. Accordingly, here Vermigli makes crystal clear his concerns about the Anabaptists in particular and specifically about the freedom which they feel they are given by Paul's reference to prophecy in this passage—a freedom to take up the prophetic mantle in order to dissent from, and speak out against, the official clergy and to disrupt the church's proper order.<sup>132</sup>

So, then, it seems extremely likely that one reason Vermigli deals with the topic of prophecy in the way that he does is the worry which he has concerning the Anabaptists. Being worried about their misuse of prophecy, Vermigli articulates (as we saw) the need for right order and authority which is threatened by this misuse. Through analysis of the

---

<sup>129</sup> PMV Gen, 81r.

<sup>130</sup> PMV 1 Cor, 206v.

<sup>131</sup> PMV 1 Cor, 207r.

<sup>132</sup> PMV 1 Cor, 206v-207r.

character of redemptive history, he develops his position on the prophetic office which we covered above. Because of its emphasis on the cessation of the prophetic office, Vermigli's position has the effect of moving the church away from models of ministry which emphasize the prophetic and, thus, away from models which can be hijacked by radical groups (only those who are trained clergy can minister in the church). In the process, Vermigli does not mind contradicting the likes of Zwingli (in his reading of 1 Corinthians 14), for whom the Florentine nonetheless had profound respect. He was not the first to fight the Anabaptists over these issues,<sup>133</sup> and may have tried to learn from past attempts such as Zwingli's. Vermigli's answer to the Anabaptists served effectively to pull the rug out from under their feet. "The church simply does not need prophets today; Jesus did not promise gifts, like prophecy, *in perpetuo*; the time for such gifts has past." The position is somewhat overstated, since as we have noted Vermigli actually still allows for the existence of prophets. Yet being overstated, it serves Vermigli well. Such rhetoric provides a stronger weapon against his opponents. Nor, it should be noted, is Vermigli the only one introducing such changes into the church. Moves similar to those made by him were also made around the same time by others, such as Bullinger who, following the death of Zwingli, moved gradually towards institutionalizing the prophetic ministry model in Zurich.<sup>134</sup> The fact that both reformers were moving in this direction is, perhaps, an indication that the wide-open views on prophecy asserted in the 1520s and 1530s simply could not be maintained in the face of the continued threat of Anabaptism.

---

<sup>133</sup> See, for instance, Zwingli's efforts in 1525 in *Von dem Predigtamt*, ZW 4: 382-433.

<sup>134</sup> Biel (n. 10); Bollinger (n. 10), pp. 159-177; Opitz (n. 10), pp. 493-513.

Yet Vermigli also concedes the existence of prophets in his own day, as we have seen. So far as we have been able to ascertain, he never provides a biblical text to support his position. Rather, his understanding here seems to be informed by, or cognizant of, at least two realities. One, which must be asserted provisionally, is the likelihood that his connection with both Strasbourg and Zurich associates him with the Rhenish school and, thus, with its interest in prophecy.<sup>135</sup> In other words, he still might, it seems reasonable to argue, possess a positive estimation of the office of prophecy (albeit, a lingering one) given his association with this school. The second, and stronger, point to be made here relates to Vermigli's connections with medieval scholastic thought. We have seen that his approach to prophecy is marked by scholastic methodology and that his thought exhibits medieval themes. We have also seen that some within the Middle Ages argued for a form of prophetic ministry which is occasional and involves not the production of divine revelation but rather the work of reformation. This was argued by Denis the Carthusian and especially Aquinas. Therefore, without wishing to comment on who might have influenced Vermigli, I would suggest that Vermigli is articulating a view essentially like the one expounded by Aquinas. God can, Vermigli holds, still call prophets on an occasional basis to reform and correct the church when she has gone astray. This, moreover, is precisely what God had done (Vermigli plainly believed) in the Reformation.

In conclusion, Vermigli's position on prophecy need not be taken as self-contradictory, though some of his assertions on the topic appear to be polemically motivated and, therefore, exaggerated. His position seems to be the product of a number

---

<sup>135</sup> Vermigli is associated with the Rhenish school by Hobbs, "Strasbourg" (n. 10), pp. 35-69, especially, p. 69.



of impulses and stimuli, only a few of which have been probed here. He believed prophets still existed in his own day, yet laid far greater emphasis on the ordinary ministry and its calling to teach the gospel to the people. This, Vermigli was convinced, was (in light of the Anabaptist threat) the key note that needed to be struck in his day.<sup>136</sup>

Dr. Jon Balserak

Visiting Scholar, University of Pennsylvania

Department of Religious Studies

Mailing address:

2200 Benjamin Franklin Parkway, Apt E814

Philadelphia, PA 19130

Tel. 267-344-7857

J.Balserak@bristol.ac.uk

Abstract: This article examines Peter Martyr Vermigli's view on the topic of prophecy, addressing specifically an apparent self-contradiction found in his position on whether prophets still exist in the Early Modern era. It argues that Vermigli's views seem, in part, to have been developed in response to the Anabaptist problem which continued to trouble the church in the 1540s and 1550s in Zurich, Strasbourg, and England. The Anabaptists, Vermigli clearly felt, took inappropriate advantage of biblical texts like 1 Corinthians 14:

---

<sup>136</sup> The author wishes to thank two anonymous reviewers of the first version of this article. Their comments were extremely helpful and are much appreciated.

3, 26-32 (which was used by Zwingli and others in the 1520s in articulating a prophetic model of ministry) to claim that they themselves were the true prophets. If they were not stopped, Vermigli believed the Anabaptists would overturn all order in the Christian church. Against this backdrop, he argued that the prophetic office had served its purpose and has now ceased. In tandem with this, however, he states that he believes prophets still exist in his own day. To explain the presence of this belief, the article points to medieval elements found in Vermigli's handling of prophecy. In particular, it discovers that he held the position, found in thinkers like Aquinas, that prophets can be raised up by God throughout the history of the church on an *ad hoc* basis to reform the church when the ordinary teaching ministry has failed in its duties.

Abbreviations: *Aquinas Opera: Sancti Thomae Aquinatis doctoris angelici Opera Omnia* ... Parmae 1852-73. - CO: *Ioannis Calvinii Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, 59 tomi, eds., Wilhelm Baum, Eduard Cunitz and Eduard Reuss, Corpus Reformatorum 29-87, Brunswick 1863-1900. - CPMV: *Companion to Peter Martyr Vermigli*, eds. Torrance Kirby, Emidio Campi and Frank A. James III, Brill 2009 - CR: *Corpus Reformatorum: Philippi Melanthonis opera quae supersunt omnia*, 28 tomi, ed., Karl Bretschneider and Heinrich Bindseil, Halle 1834-1860. - *Denis Psalms: D. Dionysii Carthusiani insigne opus commentariorum in Psalmos omnes Davidicos*, Coloniae: apud Haeredes J. Quentelii & G. Calenium 1558. - *Glossa: Biblia latina cum glossa ordinaria Walafri di Strabonis aliorumque et interlineari Anselmi Laudunensis*, Strasbourg: Adolf Rusch, for Anton Koberger, ca. 1480), [no page or column numbers]. - *Lyra Biblia Latina: Biblia*

*Latina cum postillis Nicolai de Lyra et expositionibus Guillelmi Britonis in omnes prologos S. Hieronymi et additionibus Pauli Burgensis replicisque Matthiae Doering,* Nuremberg: Anton Koberger, 1483, [no page or column numbers]. - LW: *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman, St Louis 1955–76. - PG: *Patrologiae cursus completus, series Graeca*, ed. J. P. Migne, Paris 1857-99. - PL: *Patrologiae cursus completus, series latina*, ed. JP Migne, Paris 1844-1904. - PMV Cor: *In Selectissimam D. Pauli Apostoli Primum ad Corinthios Epistolam Commentarii*, Zurich: Apud Christophorum Froschoverum 1579. - PMV Gen: *In Primum librum Mosis, qui vulgo Genesis dicitur, commentarii doctissimi D. Petri Martyris, Vermilii Florentini, ... nunc denuo in lucem editi*, Zurich: Excudebat Christophorus Froschoverus 1579. - PMV Rom: *In Epistolam S. Pauli Apostoli ad Rom. D. Petri Martyris, Vermilii Florentini, ... commentarii doctissimi, cum tractatione perutili rerum & locorum, qui ad eam epistolam pertinent*, Basel: Apud Petrum Pernam 1560. - PMV 1 Sam: *In duos libros Samuelis prophetæ qui uulgo priores libros Regum appellantur D. Petri Martyris Vermilii ... Commentarii doctissimi, , cum rerum & locorum plurimorum tractatione perutili*, Excudebat Christophorus Froschouerus: Tiguri 1567. - SC: *Supplementa Calviniana. Sermons inédits*. eds. Erwin Mühlhaupt et al., Neukirchen 1936-. - ST: *Summa Theologica*. - WA: *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Weimar 1883-1987. - ZW: Zwingli, Ulrich. *Sämtliche Werke*. Eds Emil Egli, Georg Finsler, and Walther Köhler, Leipzig 1905-59.